

VZCZCXRO5481
OO RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHLB #1145/01 2110647
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 300647Z JUL 07
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8925
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 1394

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001145

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/MARCHESE/HARDING

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/30/2027
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [LE](#) [SY](#) [FR](#)
SUBJECT: KOUCHNER'S TRIP: LITTLE TO SHOW, BUT KOUCHNER TO
RETURN IN LATE AUGUST

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador, per 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Although MP Boutros Harb perhaps best summed up current French diplomacy as "wishful thinking politics," French Ambassador Bernard Emie provided the Ambassador a relatively upbeat description of Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner's July 27-29 Lebanon visit. Emie said that getting together Lebanon's political leaders not once but twice was a worthy accomplishment in and of itself. According to Emie, Kouchner perceived some openness on the part of Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri and MP Michel Aoun, although Emie admitted that, with Hizballah stonewalling on each suggestion, Berri and Hizballah might have a good cop/bad cop routine underway. While there is nothing tangible to show for his efforts, Kouchner will be back in Lebanon in August, Emie reported. Separately, MP Walid Jumblatt told the Ambassador that the French, afraid of failure, are merely going through the motions, while Hizballah and Syria behind the scenes make final preparations for either seizing the presidency or preventing presidential elections that do not go their way. Kouchner failed to make headway in getting Hizballah to accept a package deal. End summary.

EMIE CITES GET-TOGETHERS
AS KOUCHNER'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

2. (C) On July 29, French Ambassador Bernard Emie, MP Walid Jumblatt, and MP Boutros Harb all briefed the Ambassador separately on their impressions of the July 27-29 visit of French Ambassador Kouchner. Predictably, Emie was the most upbeat. Lebanon's feuding politicians got together not once but twice, he noted: On July 27, Kouchner hosted a reception for La Celle-St. Cloud participants (i.e., the "second tier" political leaders), and on July 29 Emie hosted a luncheon for Kouchner with the "number one" National Dialogue leaders. Emie downplayed the fact that three of "top tier" leaders skipped the lunch and sent proxies instead -- Hizballah Secretary General Nasrallah, Berri, and PM Fouad Siniora (who

SIPDIS
refused to go once Berri had declined). It was "quite an accomplishment" to have such representation at the French residence, Emie said, especially given the bitter disputes between Michel Aoun and Amine Gemayel (who ignored each other at the lunch except to exchange bitter glances) over the Metn parliamentary by-election. "The food was quite good," Harb

laughed, when asked about the outcome of the lunch.

KOUCHNER WARNS OF WAR

¶3. (C) Emie said that, in part, Kouchner's message was stern. He admonished the participants individually and over the group gatherings that "the spirit of La Celle- St. Cloud had not been respected." The Lebanese themselves "had not done their homework," in following up on La Celle-St. Cloud with local contacts. Kouchner told his Lebanese interlocutors that he found the situation "quite worrying." Emie underscored that Kouchner, in hopes of frightening the leaders into action, had publicly and privately cautioned that civil war is no longer such a remote possibility. If the Lebanese do not act, there is no telling what might happen, he cautioned.

KOUCHNER PUSHES PACKAGE BASED ON CONSENSUS APPROACH

¶4. (C) In terms of substance, Emie said that Kouchner, like Jean-Claude Cousseran before him, tried again to promote a package. The elements included presidential elections on time and according to a two-thirds quorum, a National Unity Government post-elections, an agreed-upon cabinet program, and the possibility of moving parliamentary elections ahead from 2009 to 2008. Faced with Hizballah's refusal to discuss anything except a National Unity Government now, Kouchner then presented the idea of having an expanded transitional government now, along the 19-10-1 idea (which would give the opposition a "blocking" but not "toppling" minority), to oversee Lebanon between now and presidential elections (which could be as early as six weeks from now).

BEIRUT 00001145 002 OF 002

¶5. (C) According to Emie, the key to Kouchner's package is consensus -- by agreeing to support the March 8-Aoun view of a two-thirds quorum, the successful presidential candidate will be a consensus figure. By having a National Unity Government after presidential elections in which the March 8-Aoun opposition enjoys both a blocking and a "toppling" minority, the government will have to operate largely by consensus. Unfortunately, he acknowledged, no consensus emerged behind Kouchner's package. Emie believed that March 14 leaders, despite being uncomfortable with giving March 8-Aoun forces an indefinite veto over government policy, would accept Kouchner's package, if they believed Hizballah would go along.

BERRI, AOUN INDICATE OPENNESS; HIZBALLAH REPRESENTATIVES STONEWALL

¶6. (C) Emie said that he detected interest on the part of Michel Aoun to Kouchner's proposal, and "new openness" on the part of Nabih Berri. But the Hizballah representatives who met Kouchner -- Nawaf Musawi and Mohammed Fneish -- categorically rejected every bridging proposal presented by Kouchner. Emie acknowledged that Berri's openness may be less than what it appears, if Berri and Hizballah have agreed on a good cop/bad cop routine.

HARB, JUMBLATT SEE NO ACHIEVEMENT

¶7. (C) Boutros Harb and Walid Jumblatt were more downbeat. Harb said that the French are merely practicing what he described as "wishful thinking politics." Consistent with Emie's description of Berri's openness, Harb said that the only ray of hope he took away from the Kouchner events was the "relatively positive attitude" of MP Samir Azar, Berri's representative at the Emie-hosted lunch. But Harb suspected that, if there was actual movement toward a solution, then

Berri's representatives would be as negative as Hizballah.

¶8. (C) For his part, Jumblatt groused that the French are "kidding themselves" in a dangerous way. While the French continue to talk about "dialogue," Hizballah, Syria, and its allies are preparing either to seize the presidency some way or to prevent presidential elections from taking place. The French initiative has become a harmful distraction, Jumblatt argued, preventing March 14 leaders from concentrating on how to combat the objectives of Syria and Hizballah. At this point, the French are merely going through the motions, Jumblatt said, "afraid of admitting failure." The only way the French will be able to succeed is if March 14 "gives up everything." Jumblatt said that he was already uncomfortable with the extent of the concessions March 14 offered, despite continued rejections by Hizballah. Asked about the consensus approach, Jumblatt asked how one can have consensus "between freedom and Hizballah."

NEXT STEPS: KOUCHNER BACK (MON DIEU!)
DURING AUGUST VACATION SEASON

¶9. (C) In terms of next steps, Emie reported that Kouchner is committed to returning to Beirut in mid to late August ("which, for us, shows the level of commitment," Emie noted, referring to Kouchner's willingness to abandon the sacrosanct French vacation period). Kouchner also told his Lebanese interlocutors that he was willing to reconvene La Celle-St. Cloud participants in France, should that be useful. Trying to put a positive spin on the Kouchner visit, Emie concluded by reporting that all of the participants had at least reaffirmed their commitment to the "basics of the Lebanese state," including the constitution, the Taif accord, the need to avoid violence in setting political disputes, and the need to avoid reliance on foreign interference.

¶10. (C) We will also be in touch with other Lebanese contacts who participated in the Kouchner meetings. We will report any significant reactions by septel.
FELTMAN